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CHAPTER 9

Women at the intersection of the local and the global in schools and community history in Britain since the 1980s

Alison Twells

This final chapter moves beyond academic history to explore the relationship between women's history and the intersecting histories of the 'local' and the 'global' through the lens of schools and community history. Its focus is the 2007 bicentenary commemorations of the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade in the context of debates since the 1980s about the history that should be taught in British schools. The chapter argues that the practice of history in schools and community contexts continues to provide a fertile ground for the development of transnational perspectives in history. In addition, extra-academic history enables the exploration of what Pierre-Yves Saunier has termed 'problem-oriented' history, which engages explicitly with issues of social inclusion, personal and political post-imperial identities and the purpose of history.¹

The interconnection between local and global history has been a neglected dimension in the scholarship concerning the debates over the school history curriculum in Britain since the 1980s, which has focused instead on the status of global in relation to national history. On the one hand, scholars have explored the resistance of successive Conservative governments to global history. The Thatcher governments of the 1980s, responsible for the centralising Education Reform Act (1988) which brought in the national curriculum for England and Wales, were especially antagonistic to the focus on peoples' and world history topics in the 'New History', the curricula developed by the Schools History Project to address the problem of the declining popularity of history in

schools in the postwar years. Thus historians have discussed Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher's opposition to what she described as the 'shop steward syllabus' of the New History and the related argument of Education Secretary Keith Joseph that understanding of, and pride in, 'the development of the shared values which are a distinctive feature of British society and culture' could not, 'however expert the teaching, be conveyed through Roman history or American history or Caribbean history'.² They have also critiqued the claims of the more recent Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove that History teaching is too influenced by 'post-colonial guilt' and his argument that a traditional chronological run through key landmarks in British political and constitutional history is essential in order to instil national identity and pride.³ Robert Phillips' argument that the 'history debates' of the 1980s and 1990s were part of a 'hegemonic struggle over cultural transmission and heritage' forms the bedrock of such historical analyses, which interpret the Conservative agenda as symptomatic of anxiety about perceived challenges to a common British culture and identity wrought by globalisation, immigration and diversity.⁴

At the same time, historians of education have explored the scope for teachers to resist an overly-British curriculum. Despite the focus on the nation, the revision of the national curriculum in 1994 to enable greater flexibility in the programmes of study led to 'unintended opportunities',⁵ while more inclusive and multicultural agendas followed the Macpherson (1999) and Ajegbo (2007) Reports and concerns about citizenship and social cohesion following the London bombings in July 2007.⁶ As Nicola Sheldon has argued, the first decade of the twenty-first century saw a discernible shift in school history away from the development of democracy and political rights in the context of

the nation state towards a focus on cultural diversity and the development of civil rights in global context.⁷

However, the focus of historians on debates about the national-global relationships in school history has tended to obscure endeavours by teachers to link sub-national local histories to global history, often through a focus on race and inclusion. In the 1980s and early 1990s, teachers and academic historians, many of whom were associated with History Workshop, countered the Conservative narrative with a proposal to engage critically with the history and legacies of British imperialism. Raphael Samuel, noting that '[m]uch of the animus directed against the "New" history seems to have more to do with its multi-culturalism than with the pedagogic issues ostensibly at stake,' argued for the reconstitution of British history not as inward looking, but as connected to the world.⁸ In the words of Shula Marks, '[w]ays have to be found of unifying "history from above" with "history from below", structure with process and individual agency, empire with "nation"... It is not that we need to jettison the small and the local - but that we do need to see connections between things.'"⁹ A focus on cultural diversity and its local and global roots and manifestations was posed less as a threat to national identity than a means of remaking. It was necessary, as Rozina Visram argued in 1990, not 'because the 'ethnic minorities' want to learn about Black heroes and Black heroines and so gain self esteem, or because in a culturally diverse society we want to teach tolerance and respect for minority cultures' but 'because it is part of British history.'¹⁰ School history, then, was an early component of the imperial and transnational 'turns' in British historiography in the 1980s and 1990s which sought to explore the ways in which the local, national and global were mutually constitutive.

There has been little discussion of gender and women's history in relation to this debate on the local and the global. This is curious, not least because feminist historians were at the forefront of challenges to a traditional model of elite British history and their explorations of complex relationships of gender, nation, race and ethnicity were central to the development of the new imperial history.¹¹ This neglect mirrors the long-standing absence of women's and gender history both in discussions of the curriculum by historians and in the history curriculum as a whole. As Hilary Bourdillon has argued, even in the context of progressive initiatives such as the innovative focus of the Schools Council History 13-16 Project on 'approaches to knowledge' rather than 'bodies of knowledge', which provided scope for teachers to raise questions about the invisibility of women in the historical record, there was little development of women's history. Beyond the introduction of a learning resource on suffragette Emily Wilding Davison's death under the king's race-horse at the 1913 Epsom Derby, the women who appeared in the syllabus were mainly the wives and mistresses who also featured in traditional political and constitutional history.¹² This situation continued into the 1990s, despite the publication of new women's history resources for schools inspired by official recognition of women's history by the schools inspectorate and the Final Report of the History Curriculum Working Group and the possibilities opened up by the focus of attainment targets on the nature of history and historical interpretation.¹³ And indeed in the years that followed, despite some interesting work – see for example, Christine Counsell's work on 'historical significance'¹⁴ – women all but disappeared. 'Where are we?' asked Joanne Pearson in a 2012 study which revealed that women featured in the curriculum as the wives and daughters of Henry VIII and as suffragettes. As Pearson writes, while 'communities of history teachers across the UK have given considerable thought to the representation of race and ethnicity through our curricula, it is almost as

if the debates surrounding gender in academic history departments over the past 40 years have never taken place.’¹⁵

This chapter adopts a case study approach to explore some of the opportunities for, and challenges involved in, integrating gender and women's history into the interlinked histories of the local and the global in school history. It takes as its starting point *Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield*,¹⁶ an educational resource I co-wrote in 2007 for the Development Education Centre (South Yorkshire) in collaboration with Burngreave Voices, a community history project in inner-city Sheffield in the north of England. Aimed at children in Key Stages 2 (7-11 years) and 3 (11-14 years), this resource was initially conceived as an accompaniment to a play written and performed in primary schools by Dead Earnest, a touring company which presents theatre with a social conscience. Both resource and play focused on the 1790 visit to Sheffield of the famous former slave and abolitionist Olaudah Equiano. *Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield* explored how benefits from transatlantic slavery extended beyond port towns to non-coastal areas, uncovering what Geoff Cubitt has termed the ‘footprint of slavery’ in an inland industrial locality.¹⁷ It also contributed to the widespread critiques of the way in which official commemorations of the bicentenary of the abolition of the slave trade were over-focused on eminent white men, especially the MP William Wilberforce.¹⁸ Its focus, therefore, was firmly on local-global interconnections; as we shall see, it was also on the agency of local actors in shaping global developments.

While the ‘global’ encompasses more than the history of European empires and colonial slavery, the transnational flows of goods, capital, people and ideas central to the history of the transatlantic slave trade, plantation slavery and the abolition movement make

these appropriate focii for a discussion of local-global interconnections. The slave trade was central to the process by which Britain became a global power in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In economic terms, the trade included not just the goods and human cargo that followed the triangular journey, but the general wealth creation through associated trade, customs revenue, the development of the navy and imperial wars and the general development of trade with the Americas. The transnational crossing of borders and boundaries also happened at the social and cultural levels in, for example, the emergence of new consumer goods in European markets, the transformation of the Caribbean, the Americas and West Africa through forced migration, the development of slave cultures and the connections, interactions and networking involved in the Abolition Movement.¹⁹

This chapter opens with a discussion of the different tributaries in schools and community history that gave rise to the focus on local-global connections in *Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield*. It then moves on to discuss the individual women who feature in the resource: local Sheffield abolitionist and philanthropist Mary-Anne Rawson, former slave and autobiographer Mary Prince, and Jamaican religious and political leader, Nanny of the Maroons. It highlights the value of biographical approaches as a ‘useful tool for attracting and holding interest in large, complex historical processes’,²⁰ as highlighted in the first chapter in this book. As Carla Freeman has argued, the exploration of personal experiences of globalisation are ‘a way of bringing home the lived realities of these mammoth forces.’²¹ They also draw attention to human agency in terms of everyday choices, albeit within certain confines and sometimes very coercive structures.²² Biographies further allow consideration of the emotional and the intimate, including what Burton and Ballantyne refer to as the ‘intimacies of global imperial

violence'.²³ A focus on biographies thus emphasises the limits of macrostructural accounts, enabling in some cases an undermining of what Freeman critiques as 'masculinist grand theories of globalisation that ignore gender as an analytical lens and local empirical studies of globalisation in which gender takes center stage'.²⁴ A focus on women's lives, as will be shown here, also has the potential to disrupt any simplistic dichotomy between the local and the global. However, as will be discussed, there are significant challenges involved in developing such a focus in schools and community history contexts, ranging from difficulties of piecing together women's lives from fragmentary traces within the colonial archive to issues of purpose, audience and the negotiation of public perceptions.

The second part of the chapter turns to explore the crossing of disciplinary boundaries that Merry Wiesner-Hanks has argued is also part of the 'trans' project.²⁵ My focus here, however, is less about drawing on methodologies used outside the academic discipline of History than in acknowledging the differences in approach and aims between academic history and school and community history. School and community history are explicitly concerned with the potentially transformative impact of history, evident in the use of history in capacity-building and wider community cohesion in a community regeneration context and in the understanding of history in schools as a means of ethical and moral education, of 'creating tolerant, empathetic, responsible and questioning citizens'.²⁶ Addressing Tim Hitchcock's recent argument that there is in Britain 'a "crisis" in the humanities' which 'lies in how we have our public debates, rather than in their content',²⁷ I argue that we need to do more than launch our work into the public domain. Following Clare Anderson's proposal for 'destabilising' our focus on official archives 'as the only starting point for writing history' and engaging instead

with ‘the alternative knowledges and cultural practices of families and communities’,²⁸ I argue that academic historians of the transnational might learn from this focus on wider questions about identity, inclusion and the purpose of history.

Inclusive and inter-connected histories: the myth of the local?

Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield was produced through collaboration with two Sheffield-based organisations, both of which place(d) a strong emphasis on the relationship of the local to the global. Firstly, the Development Education Centre (South Yorkshire) is part of a network of national and international organisations which focuses on the development of a global curriculum in schools. Development Education promotes an approach to teaching and learning which combines an exploration of the unequal yet interdependent economic and cultural relationships between the Global North and South with a Freire-inspired pedagogy in which student-centred, enquiry-based active learning is central to the development of active citizenship.²⁹

Since its emergence in the 1960s and 1970s, Development Education has seen changing fortunes in relation to school history in Britain. In the 1970s and 1980s, the network of Development Education Centres (DECs) in Britain joined with local authorities in the development and promotion of anti-racist teaching materials. The emphasis was on the development of skills through which to handle information critically alongside a focus on ‘histories’ rather than a Great Tradition.³⁰ In the late 1980s and 1990s, practitioners found themselves in profound contestation with supporters of the new national curriculum in terms of approach and content, emphasising the value of experiential learning and empathy and arguing that British history could not be understood apart from global developments. This is made explicit in the title of *The Empire in South*

Yorkshire, the 1992 publication by the DEC in Sheffield which explored the industrial revolution in global context and was a forerunner of *Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield*.³¹

During the 1990s and 2000s, as both global education and active learning became more mainstream, the DEC in South Yorkshire worked with schools across the region to integrate global themes into the curriculum and to support the development of inclusive histories which recognise the diverse heritage of children.³² *Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield* addressed the above issues while also attempting to build the confidence of teachers in dealing with difficult and emotive subjects such as the slave trade and abolition.³³

The second organisation which gave rise to the resource is Burngreave Voices (2004-2007), a community history project in a deprived inner city area of north Sheffield. Community history emerged in Britain in the years surrounding the millennium to become a hugely popular form of public history. Projects involve members of a community, geographical or otherwise, usually untrained as historians, in producing history.³⁴ The movement has been hugely enabled by funding streams such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and UK and European regeneration initiatives which identified community history groups as a means of building capacity for wider regeneration initiatives.³⁵ In effect, such funding has extended the practice of local history beyond the largely middle-class Local History Society into many working-class post-industrial neighbourhoods. Minority ethnic groups are under-represented but by no means absent.

Burngreave Voices, funded jointly by New Deal for Communities, a regeneration programme introduced by the Labour government in 1998, and Museums Sheffield,

developed a number of initiatives to involve members of Burngreave's large immigrant population. While local history talks proved unsuccessful, Treasure Days, to which residents brought artefacts which represented an aspect of their lifestory, were much more popular. A short film about the corner shop – a minor institution in working-class neighbourhoods since the Industrial Revolution and a key component of Indian and Pakistani life in Britain since the 1970s – was created for a new display at Weston Park Museum in Sheffield. Oral history interviews were recorded and presented on the project website, which aimed to 'celebrate the history of the area and bring to life the stories of people living here.'³⁶

The Development Education and community history contexts for the production of *Olaudah Equiano in Sheffield* complemented the imperative to provide school students with a means of understanding the contested nature of the abolition commemorations of 2007. We aimed to counter the 'abolition discourse' which represented the Transatlantic slave trade as part of a very distant and disconnected past, even as 'other' to a Britain which placed abolition as central to its identity.³⁷ We explored the presence of slave traders and former slaves in the region through a focus on the papers of Benjamin Spencer, a merchant from Cannon Hall near Barnsley who was involved in the triangular trade in the mid-eighteenth century, and a painted portrait of the Earl of Chesterfield, his wife and children and an unnamed 'Nubian slave boy'. We brought together opponents of slavery from the Caribbean with national and local figures. James Montgomery, a Sheffield evangelical, journalist and poet, left copious documentary evidence concerning his abolitionist and wider missionary activities. Joseph Mather, a filesmith and a street entertainer whose songs express his empathy for enslaved Africans alongside the exploited working people in early industrial Britain,³⁸

represented the Sheffield metalworkers who petitioned Parliament against the slave trade in 1789 and the working men who founded the Sheffield Society for Constitutional Information (a forerunner of the more famous London Corresponding Society, of which Equiano himself was a member).³⁹ Mary-Anne Rawson was a celebrated abolitionist, a founder member of both the Sheffield Female Antislavery Society (1825) and the Sheffield Society for the Universal Abolition of Slavery (1837) and memorialised in Benjamin Hayden's painting of the 1840 World Antislavery Convention. Rawson was one of three women in the resource, included alongside former slave and autobiographer, Mary Prince and Nanny, spiritual and political leader of the Jamaican Maroons. Their (brief) inclusion highlighted various challenges concerning the availability of sources and the interpretation and presentation of women's histories to a wider audience, as I will now explore.

Mary-Anne Rawson and female abolitionism

Mary-Anne Rawson was at the centre of anti-slavery activity in Sheffield from the 1820s to the 1840s. With her mother Elizabeth Read, she was a founder member of the Sheffield Female Antislavery Society (1825) which emerged as part of the new campaign against plantation slavery from 1823. She was involved in the range of activities – fund-raising, writing, the sugar boycott and later petitioning – that saw the creation of anti-slavery as a popular movement by the early 1830s.⁴⁰ After the Abolition of Slavery Act (1833) had ushered in the apprenticeship system whereby former slaves were required to work for their former owners for four further years, the movement was revived. Rawson raised funds for the Thompson Normal School in Jamaica and corresponded with Joseph Sturge and his sister Sophia during Sturge's investigation of

the conditions of apprenticeship.⁴¹ In 1837, she founded the Sheffield Ladies Association for the Universal Abolition of Slavery.

Abolition was part of Rawson's wider missionary-philanthropic activities, which included support for local Sunday Schools and Bible and auxiliary missionary societies and later, the promotion of teetotalism and education of the poor. Philanthropic women have enjoyed a long visibility in history, academic and otherwise. Alongside queens, consorts and other female 'firsts', they were members of the original group of 'women worthies' who found their way into history books before the first wave of women's history writing in the 1980s. Such women were readily celebrated in the public domain, although it is their caring roles that are predominant over their campaigning and activism. See for example the image on the British five pound note of Elizabeth Fry reading the Bible to women and children, warders and other visitors in Newgate Gaol in 1816,⁴² and statues of Florence Nightingale as the 'Lady with the Lamp', which continue to adorn hospital grounds around the country. In school history, philanthropic ladies continued to be present in new women's history textbooks books that emerged in the 1990s, where the celebratory narrative had progressed to address the issue of women's gradual movement into the public sphere.⁴³ They are also the most prominent women in early educational resources which sought to connect local and global history.⁴⁴ In the context of the decline of women's history in schools in the 2000s and 2010s, they are among the few women who are still reliably included in the history curriculum alongside the wives of Henry VIII and a handful of suffragettes.

In terms of academic history, a focus on local-global interconnections has informed a significant shift from understanding philanthropic women as do-gooders with free time

due to servants and wealth,⁴⁵ to activists who lived 'lives of active engagement with what we would term politics and philanthropy.'⁴⁶ Historians have unpicked philanthropic women's position at the nexus of cultural webs to explore complexities of class, gender and empire. For example, Davidoff and Hall have discussed the importance of philanthropy to the gender roles which gave shape to the new middle class, while Eileen Yeo explored the place of philanthropic practice in the creation of both middle-class women's public space and class identity, as working-class women were represented as in need of their civilising care.⁴⁷ The first sustained exploration of lady philanthropists as abolitionists came with Clare Midgley's *Women Against Slavery: the British Campaigns, 1780-1870*, which made visible hitherto hidden women as members of local ladies anti-slavery societies and placed them at the centre of the popular campaign of the 1820s and 1830s that saw the shift in focus from gradual to immediate emancipation.⁴⁸ Over subsequent years, in the context of the New Imperial History, historians examined the links between domestic philanthropy and missionary activity overseas. Antoinette Burton and Susan Thorne, for example, explored women's missionary philanthropic activities through the lens of 'imperial feminism' and 'missionary imperialism'.⁴⁹ My own monograph, *The Civilising Mission and the English Middle Class, 1792-1850*, focused on Sheffield to explore the significance of local (philanthropic) and global (missionary) reform agendas and practice in the making of the middle class. Mary-Anne Rawson's family, the Reads of Wincobank Hall, were central to this new culture: nonconformist supporters of the radical Christian reform movement which aimed at domestic and global transformation.⁵⁰

In the bicentenary year of 2007, women abolitionists occasionally featured in public history via local history booklets and BBC articles and websites.⁵¹ For our resource,

Rawson was an important inclusion – and an easy one given extensive source materials, including poems, pamphlets, abstention cards (to promote the boycott of slave-grown sugar) and letters to and from family members concerning their anti-slavery commitments. Her activities demonstrate that anti-slavery politics were never an all-male affair, centred only on Parliament and petitions. Indeed, we could have gone further in showing anti-slavery as promoted in kitchens (the boycott of sugar) and drawing rooms (anti-slavery tea services, sewing groups) ⁵² and as part of a pedagogy whereby evangelical mothers encouraged their children to write anti-slavery poems; to emphasise the place of abolitionism and other global concerns in the very fabric of women's daily lives.⁵³

However, along with other anti-slavery women from her class and philanthropic background, Rawson nonetheless presents difficulties in terms of presentation to a wider audience. One issue concerns her imbrication in the kind of abolitionist standpoint that academics and the more radical commemorations in 2007 were keen to deconstruct. Brave, principled, energetic, pioneering and outspoken as they were, philanthropic women were also interfering, condescending and culturally imperialist in their desire to remake both slave and working-class cultures in a Christian middle-class image.⁵⁴ Even when recast less as individual Lady Bountifuls and more as members of a social and political movement, their abolitionism – as that of white middle-class men – was not straightforwardly about 'freedom'. Indeed, while a focus on women as principled campaigners and activists, battling against the conservatism of the male anti-slavery leadership, offers one way forward, their activities often worked against or at least compromised the agency of black and working-class abolitionists.⁵⁵ On reflection, this may have been an opportunity for us to link anti-slavery to

contemporary practices, such as well-meaning Western volunteering in the 'Third World'.

Related to this are the attitudes that students bring to the school classroom, which have been shown to exert 'profound influences on their starting points ... and on the version of the past ... which [they] find most useable in understanding and explaining the present.'⁵⁶ Unlike the adventure in Equiano's account, the films featuring Wilberforce, the evidence of Mather's song-writing and drunken performances and Nanny the freedom fighter, there is no equivalent popular cultural heroic narrative to attach to lady abolitionists, especially in a non-academic context where recovery and celebration are at least as important as critical evaluation. There may even be resistance to a focus on women and gender.⁵⁷ As Katherine Prior has argued in relation to museums, academic and public historians often occupy 'two mutually incomprehending worlds' whereby the former understand little about the negotiation with public perceptions that are central to public history.⁵⁸ This raises important issues concerning audience and strategies for interpretation in the context of contemporary cultural attitudes that academic historians rarely negotiate.

The slave autobiographer and the Maroon leader

Neither Mary Prince nor Nanny of the Maroons had any Sheffield connection, but as we wanted to place our home-grown abolitionists – Montgomery, Rawson and Mather – in the context of the wider movement, we included Wilberforce to represent the national picture as well the two women from the Caribbean to represent black peoples' resistance to slavery. They appear only fleetingly. The issue of extant sources (and confidence in using them) is pertinent here. While the twenty-five years since the

publication of Barbara Bush's groundbreaking *Slave Women in Caribbean Society* has seen women's resistance to and survival and accommodation of slavery well documented by historians,⁵⁹ there remains little primary evidence relating to individual women's lives. As Clare Anderson has written in relation to subaltern history in the Indian Ocean, 'Their footprints are usually easy to see, but their footsteps are extraordinarily difficult to trace'.⁶⁰

In terms of academic history, both *The History of Mary Prince* and the story of Nanny of the Maroons are hugely complex. Apart from the fact that no evidence remains of Prince's life after 1833, the year of the passage of the Abolition of Slavery Act, the narrative limits of her 1829 autobiography pose significant problems for historians and literary scholars. Prince related her story to an amanuensis and her text was variously shaped by the requirements of the abolitionist campaign, by Victorian ideals of respectable femininity and by conventions prohibiting the open discussion of female sexual choices and sexual abuse.⁶¹ Similar points can be made about Nanny of the Maroons. While she appears in records of the first Maroon Wars against the British in 1733-1739, Nanny exists mainly in oral form, brought to life in stories that circulated after Jamaican independence in 1962. As Nicholas J. Saunders argues, in the case of Nanny, 'history and legend [are] hopelessly intertwined'.⁶²

In terms of school history, however, Prince's story can be told in a straightforward way. Whether we call her Mary Prince, Molly Wood or Mary James, she was born in Bermuda and worked as a household slave on that island and in Antigua. She came to England in 1828 with her then owners, the Woods, with the hope that she could buy her manumission. This was denied her by Mr and Mrs Wood, who continued to maltreat her

and force her to work, despite her arthritic joints and other disabilities, until she escaped to the office of Thomas Pringle, Secretary to the Anti-Slavery Society. There, abolitionist Susanna Strickland wrote down her story, making her patois accessible to a British audience. In our resource, we used Prince's own words, her statement at the end of the text that slaves want freedom.⁶³ In this context, Mary Prince gives a voice to enslaved women. Her journey to London shows, moreover, that transnational boundary-crossings were not a male preserve. Like Freeman's Barbadian higglers, Prince resists the local/feminine, global/masculine dynamic while demonstrating how 'global processes enact themselves on local ground [and] local processes and small-scale actors might be seen as the very fabric of globalization'.⁶⁴

Recent scholarship in transnational history suggests how much more we could have done with Prince's story. We might have included her heart-rending description of her mother dressing her children for market and witnessing them all sold away from her, for example. With older pupils, we might have discussed Prince's muffled references to the abuse she suffered, sexual and otherwise, and some of the sexual compromises she made along the way, to explore the limits placed by culture on what can be said, and the double standard which saw sexual slurs cast on her character during the libel case.⁶⁵

These raise issues about choice in coercive cultures and make clear the gendered dimensions of enslavement as part of the 'intimacies of global imperial violence.'⁶⁶

Similar points might be made about Nanny of the Maroons. We might have raised questions about the limits of the colonial archive and explored why accounts of her life and her role in Jamaican history cannot be evidence-based. As Jenny Sharpe has argued, 'To consider Nanny as a historical agent ... is to test the limits of that we traditionally consider to be history.'⁶⁷ We might have explored fictional representations of her life to

ask why Nanny has become such a powerful icon of Jamaican national identity,⁶⁸ looking at her place in the realm of popular memory and 'intangible heritage' that is a current focus of research in public history.⁶⁹

Indeed, research on race and heritage suggests the importance of such stories to black and ethnic minority peoples' lives in Britain today. Laurajane Smith has recently argued that British Caribbean visitors approached museum displays in 2007 with a focus on gauging the public status of interpretations of their history which ran counter to what she terms the Authorised Heritage Discourse; elite and whitewashed public history.⁷⁰ In a schools context, the importance of wider narratives about transnational and migration histories has been emphasised in a study of secondary school pupils at multi-ethnic schools in Britain and the Netherlands. Grever et al found that pupils from immigrant backgrounds saw greater relevance in history that focused on transnational topics such as slavery, migration, non-European perspectives on European history and colonial wars; girls from immigrant backgrounds especially valued a curriculum that included religion and history concerning 'connection with my family'. The authors argue that to 'enable young people to construct continuity between past and present, and to enhance their understanding of their place in the world, it is imperative to connect local and national history to world history and the history of globalisation so that they can see 'the bigger picture' of the world they are growing up in.'⁷¹

While research into museum audiences suggests the significance of the personal and the local in terms of individual engagement with public history,⁷² historical figures such as Mary Prince and Nanny of the Maroons raise the further possibility that the personal may not always map onto the local, if the local is defined in a parochial way. For the

many people in Britain who are members of diasporic communities, the global is part of their intimate daily lives, their local story. This is apparent in the stories on the Burngreave Voices website and in the Treasure Days, when artefacts from a migration story - a chillum pipe, a British passport, a ring belonging to a grandfather in Pakistan - took their place alongside a coronation teaspoon from 1902, a child's valentine card for his mum from 1946 and a 1980s CND banner. Similarly, recordings of a small number of oral histories – see for example 'Growing up in Sanaa, Yemen', 'Home life in Burao, Somalia', 'Life on my grandfather's farm in Pakistan' and 'School days in Jamaica in the 1930s' -- form an integral part of the project website.⁷³ Such a focus on artefacts and the migration journey brings women into the picture, both as migrants and settlers and as keepers of family and other archives.⁷⁴ In this sense then, Mazlish's argument that the local is a 'myth' that needs discarding, that '[t]he reality is "glocalization", of a most complex sort', rings true.⁷⁵ Like Equiano, many Britons are also 'citizen[s] of the world.'⁷⁶

Border crossings: academic, schools and community history

The above discussion of Mary-Anne Rawson, Mary Prince and Nanny of the Maroons is suggestive of some of the differences between academic and other historical practices including, for example, the importance in schools and community history of strategies for interpretation in the context of contemporary cultural attitudes. While the fact of this difference is sometimes acknowledged by academic historians,⁷⁷ it is rarely explored. In this final section of the chapter, I argue that a focus on these wider questions of representation enables reflection on both the academic method and the purpose of history.

The difficult relationship between academic and extra-academic histories can be seen in a variety of contexts, including longstanding accusations by academic historians that museums and heritage sites are contributing to the ‘dumbing down’ of history and criticisms of school history teaching for ‘spoon-feeding’ and insufficiently preparing pupils for their undergraduate studies. It can also be seen in the approach to public engagement which focuses exclusively on correcting errors in the public narrative, a relationship conceived as a one-way process, rather like the old imperial history emphasis on the flow from metropolis to empire. This is perhaps most stark in Margaret Macmillan’s anxiety-ridden suggestion that we – academics – have surrendered our territory to amateurs and need to claw it back.⁷⁸ This is not to suggest that our insistence on the value of academic history in allowing the exploration of complexities is anything but valuable and necessary – see, for example, Nicholas Draper’s discussion of the role of media in distorting research findings of the Legacies of British Slavery Project at UCL.⁷⁹ But our practice should involve more than becoming gatekeepers of nuance and complexity in endeavours to counter ‘bad’ history.

For all of our current emphasis on ‘impact’, academic historians remain nervous and defensive about responses to our research in the public domain. This is very different from the preoccupation with audience and the importance of communication in schools and community history. In successful school history lessons, teachers seek to engage pupils of all ages and abilities through a range of sources – including visual evidence, film, narratives, including historical fiction – and investigative, imaginative and empathic activities, in order to foster pupils’ intellectual and personal development.⁸⁰ The same is true in community history, where the focus on inclusion and integration, on bringing communities together to enable greater mutual understanding and the

construction and consolidation of identities in the present, places less emphasis on evidence-based arguments and more on learning through the senses, inspiring empathy, engaging with popular discourses and political debates. Phillips sees such methods as free from the 'strait-jacket' of academic history'.⁸¹ Husbands goes further to question whether 'an academic discipline called "history", a school subject called "history" and a widespread popular interest called "history" have the same meaning, despite their shared label.' Others have argued (albeit in an American context) that teachers have a greater kinship with public historians than with academics.⁸² As Chris Culpin stated in his 2007 call to academics to join teachers in updating syllabuses and helping to write better resources, any relationship must be 'based on a realistic understanding of what history in the school curriculum is, and is striving to be.'⁸³

This is our loss. While I am not suggesting that academic historians abandon our commitment to rigour and evidence, it is my belief that we have lost our way, despite the radical and democratic aims of 'history from below', women's history and the 'imperial turn' in the 1980s and 1990s, all of which were led by historians who linked their academic work with political agendas for social transformation. Antoinette Burton has expressed the concern that a side-effect of the imperial turn may well have been to leave 'the sanctity of the nation intact.' Transnational history, she claims, can enable us to 'resist the seduction of national narratives and make sense of the violences they enact under the guise of patriotism, imperial and otherwise', if we 'convince students that this is a valuable project, connected to the development of civic participation and responsibility in the twenty-first century in transformative and enduring ways'.⁸⁴ To do that, however, we need a different style of communication. Helen Rogers' recent argument in relation to 'history from below', that at some point in the 1980s an

obfuscating theory took hold which saw people and their agency left behind,⁸⁵ can also be made in relation to women's history. While feminist historians have long explored complex relationships,⁸⁶ recent years have seen a severing of a link between feminist activism, adult education in women's history and academic research and women's history has become a more inward-looking academic field, preoccupied with internal debates rather than wider interactions.⁸⁷ There is nothing to suggest that the current interest in intersectionality or in the deconstruction of the nation will be any different.⁸⁸ While I agree with Hitchcock that there is in Britain 'a "crisis" in the humanities' which 'lies in how we have our public debates',⁸⁹ we need to do more than launch our work into the public domain. Clare Anderson's argument for the 'opening up of the discipline of history' through an ethnographic exploration of contemporary understandings – in her research, of imperialism and its impact on society – is both radical and urgent. A closer relationship with schools and community history is one way of enabling this departure.

Such developments can be seen in recent collaborations which bring together women's history and the history of local-global connections in a public history context. 'Local Roots, Global Routes: Legacies of African Enslavement in Hackney', a film and museum resource produced as part of Legacies of British Slavery, aims to show amongst other things the role of the compensation of slave owners after abolition in British social, economic and cultural development during the C19th. While women are absent from the early sections, both as historical subjects and expert historians, Mary Wollstonecraft and Anna-Letitia Barbauld appear in a section entitled 'Hackney and Abolition'. The two late-eighteenth century writers, both of whom were members of the congregation of the Newington Green unitarian chapel, are represented as change-makers. They provide

evidence that Wilberforce et al are only one part of the story and women's choices via the abstention movement made anti-slavery a domestic and local campaign.⁹⁰ My own article on the South Yorkshire Through Time website takes a similarly biographical approach, contextualising Mary-Anne Rawson both in terms of what she and other women add to our understanding of the national antislavery movement and in the context of a range of Christian approaches to poverty and slavery, but taking as a starting point the desire to commemorate in the community which has since grown up in the area of Sheffield in which she lived.⁹¹

Other projects reveal a creative approach to history, often combined with an explicit sense of purpose. The 'Women on the Platform' initiative, which emerged from an HLF-funded project Women in Stone, created by the Edinburgh Adult Education group Damned Rebel Bitches, celebrates Scottish women abolitionists as part of a campaign for more public commemorations of historical women. Their work has included the production of a schools teaching pack, an exhibition at the Museum of Edinburgh and a creative project of sculpted heads made by schoolgirls and unveiled at the Scottish Parliament. 'It is on the ground', they write, 'at a local level and through the galvanising of ordinary citizens, that we will achieve real change.'⁹² Moving away from philanthropists, a range of black history projects place a similar emphasis on inspiration.⁹³ Creative projects such as 'An Interview with Mary Prince', which imagines Prince's own words which were omitted from her autobiography, makes connections with the fictional representations of enslaved women for whom scant sources exist, but which represent a profound need to see our ancestors represented in history.⁹⁴

Such projects place communication at the heart of their practice, extending the postmodern critique which emphasises that history is not a value-free enterprise – a critique that we fully accept in academic work – to restore a sense of purpose to history. Collaborations which bring together academic research and community projects – see for example, the explorations by Pakistani women in Rotherham of their life histories and heritage that are a key strand of the Imagine Project⁹⁵ and sponsorship of community history by the Women's History Network⁹⁶ – might enable a critical community of historians to create a new transnational history of women that spans universities, school and public history.

Conclusion

Academics with expertise in transnational history are well placed to argue for the centrality of local-global connections to understanding national histories and to education for citizenship in the globalised world of the 21st century. In its focus on interaction, connection, entanglement, networks, movement, intersection, hybridity, crossing, transnational history 'bridges the national, the sub-national (local, regional), and the global by exploring actors, movements, and forces that cross boundaries and penetrate the fabric of nations.'⁹⁷ As Peter Mandler has argued, it is in 'bringing to the table' the 'wider horizons' of their research that academic historians have something to contribute to schools and other history.⁹⁸

In turn, schools and community history can bring things to our table as academics. They invite us to consider the ways in which a focus on the relationships between the local, the national and the global are linked to issues of inclusion and social cohesion; the relevance of contemporary concerns with identities and the importance of negotiating

received ideas;⁹⁹ the significance of individual life stories, narratives and story-telling in the development of historical understanding and personal development;¹⁰⁰ and the importance of communication and all that implies in terms of priorities of engagement and audience. They challenge us to extend the postmodern insistence that history is not a value-free activity by adopting a less suspicious attitude towards the explicitly positioned and purposeful histories promoted by many teachers and public historians. In the words of a Head of History at one London school at the time of Conservative Education Secretary Michael Gove's reforms: 'I won't be adopting the curriculum. It is my duty to meet the learning and cultural needs of the community I serve'.¹⁰¹ Such stances can inspire us to restore a sense of purpose to history and to develop a practice that is aware of our positionality and transparent about the nature of our bias and has humanity in mind in its aim of creating citizens.¹⁰²

As I have discussed in this chapter, scant sources and public perceptions can mitigate against the easy inclusion of women's history as central to the study of local-global connections. Indeed, it is hard to resist the conclusion, with Rob Phillips, that the local and global finds a place in schools and, to a lesser extent, public history in Britain, precisely because it is part of a 'hegemonic struggle over cultural transmission and heritage';¹⁰³ because issues of national identity remain so live.¹⁰⁴ It might be that we will only begin to have an equivalent discussion about women's history if academics engage more closely with public debates – for example, concerning sexual violence, the use of the figure of the woman in justifications of war, or antagonism to women in social media, or explore the 'treasures' and their associated stories which find representation in community history projects, public history representations of the slave trade and its legacies, or in topics of religion and migration identified by the girls in the study by

Grever et al.¹⁰⁵ Might that enable us to develop a critical community of historians to create a new transnational history of women that spans universities, school and public history sites?

The author would like to thank Julie Carlier, Peter D'Sena, Clare Midgley and Helen Rogers for their helpful critical feedback on this chapter.

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